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An introduction briefly reviews attitudes that critics have revealed toward the tools which linguistic study has provided for literary analysis. Then two of these linguistic tools--the analysis and description of sound and the awareness of the ways in which meaning is expressed by structure--are discussed and illustrated. Fringe benefits" of linguistic study, such as recognition of the varieties of spoken and written language and an admission of the inevitability of language change are also viewed as aids to literary analysis and appreciation. (BN)

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The Use of Linguistics

In The Teaching of Literature

The title, which probably should be changed to "The Uses of Linguistics," suggests the way I view my topic. My approach is generally utilitarian: I advocate using any method from any linguistic school which can help in the teaching of literature. If the term utilitarian makes you think of the narrowness of Bentham, try to think also of the breadth of Mills. If title, point-of-view, and juxtaposition of papers on this program connote the suggestion "pedestrian," try charitably to take also the connotation "restful."

Ten or fifteen years ago, at a time when a number of English teachers began to suspect that linguistics--however one defined the term--might always be with us, a few adventuring literary critics began to seek out and describe the particular contributions by which linguistics could add to, rearrange, or improve the study and interpretation of literature. In the intervening years, we have seen the popularizing of the term stylistics; the coining, by proper linquistic analogy, of the "in-group" term stylostatistics; and the rapid building of a collection of criticism based more-or-less on linguistics rather than on the academically accepted and blessed discipline of philology.

A glance at this criticism, the off-spring of the quick marriage between so-called traditional criticism and the so-called "new linguistics," reveals too frequently what could be expected from such a morganatic union. The publications display about the same amount of bickering and continuing lack of agreement as do the two disciplines which begot them. And, as in the parental disciplines, the arguments are as frequently directed by believers against other believers as they are against non-believers. A British reviewer, marked by his work as a sometime believer, said in July, 1966, "So far linguistic criticism has tended to pass no further than description of style

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and this is hardly criticism."[1] In an article in November, 1966, an American scholar, whose publications have increased significantly the library of linguistically based criticism, stated a diametrically opposed position and quoted fellow critics who agreed with him that "style has intrinsic meaningfulness."[2]

A third scholar, obviously not of linguistic persuasion, pronounced in a 1966 review a plague on both these critics' houses.[3] Damning linguistic critics in general with her dubious praise, she wrote

> "Linguistics, in the end, will be of extreme help to critics already attuned to poetry, just as Freudian theory has been, but linguists themselves, who are simply uneducated in the reading of poetry, tend to take on, without realizing it, documents whose primary sense and value they are not equipped to absorb."

Damning specifically, this same reviewer accused a critic who had used explication based on transformational grammar of failing to understand the "understood transformation" of a closing line in a Shakespearean sonnet. The reviewer argues that the critic in question--in his determined attempt to find parallelism in the sonnet--mistook the passive transform of "All losses are restored and sorrows end" as "Then you restore all losses and you end sorrows." In actuality, the review-writer says, the transform of the sentence clearly should be "Then the thought of you restores all losses. . . ." Otherwise, she argues, Shakespeare's distinction between the conjectured image of the friend and the friend's actual presence is lost. For, the reviewer concludes, (with overstatement, I think), ". . . if only Shakespeare could have said so confidently, 'Then you restore all losses and you end sorrows,' these poems of unrequited love would have no reason for being."

Having used these examples for my own devious purpose--of showing how quickly and how far criticism often gets from any basis that I would consider "linguistic" (or even, to use an old-fashioned term, philologic), I propose to describe what tools for literary analysis linguistic study has given us and to illustrate some of the ways in which these tools can be used. Here in Hawaii in late November, inspired or bemused by this summer sun, this happy island, I make one tentative, tenuous suggestion regarding sound and meaning. Otherwise, my proposals are quite orthodox, if not routine.

Beyond dispute, linguistics has, I firmly believe, made us aware of the systems of language. It has analyzed, described, and labeled the significant sounds, or phonemes, which we use and the patterns or groups into which these sounds of English can fit. It has illustrated how these sound groups, as morphemes or as words, fit into larger patterns to form phrases and statements. If we add to these concepts of structural, or descriptive, linguistics the concepts of transformational-generative grammar, we are able to use the three convenient language categories of a phonological component, a syntactic component, and a semantic component. With transformational grammar, we can illustrate, in part, how an underlying deep structure, of which all speakers possess mastery--and perhaps possess also mystery--controls the surface structure, the actual spoken or written communication.

In summarizing the tools which linguistic study has made available to us, we need to consider also some important by-products of linguistic research. For linguistics has made us aware of the variety of dialects existing in each langauge. It also has made us, at least in part, ready to recognize the various functional varieties each speaker utilizes in the

language various situations in which he takes part. And, strengthening the findings of earlier historical studies, linguistics has helped us see that change in any living language is inevitable. These by-products of linguistic study already have had some effect on the study of literature; they have the potential for much greater effect.

To come finally to the direct consideration of my topic: What tools for analysis does linguistics give us, if, loading the scales a bit, we give a definition of literature which stresses its dependence on language? This dependence is implicit in the definition of Martin Joos quoted by C. F. Voeglin:

> ". . . literature can be said to be utterances or groups of utterances over a certain minimum length which are--or are likely to be--repeated in identical or nearly identical form."[4]

An obvious tool, and one which critical bibliography shows to be a favorite one, is to be found in the fairly exact analysis and description of sounds which linguistics offers. The obvious genre to which we can apply this tool is poetry. To the old theories about the relationship of sound and meaning (most of which are subject to question if not to downright disbelief--such as the proposal that -ih /ih/ sounds [as in little] connote smallness and eeh /iy/ sounds connote even more smallness, so that very short skirts should be called "meany-skirts") linguists have added theories about the "weighting" of sounds by repetition. There is an aesthetic purpose, one critic proposes,[5] in the frequency of the /ay/ diphthong in Keat's sonnet on Chapman's Homer; it is an aesthetic device we can understand if we consider the frequency of the sound in relation to such key words of the sonnet as silent.

Less tenuous, though the subject of continuing and heated debate, is the aesthetic effect achieved by the contrast between the regular metrical pattern that is superimposed on words used in a poem and the usual patterns of stress, juncture, and pitch given to these same words by the intonation patterns of normal speech. Whether one calls this contrast between metrical pattern and normal speech rhythm counterpoint or tension or interplay, critics seem to agree that it exists. Critical controversy arises over the method by which one describes and interprets such rhythmic contrast and over whether or not each reading of a work gives a variant contrast-pattern.

Along with the theories regarding sound and meaning, I would propose also that a phonological analysis of poetry can show us, in part, how some lines receive emphasis because of speech-slowing consonant-plus-vowel contrasts used in comparison with lines in which little such consonant-caused impedimentation occurs. To be more specific, I propose that certain consonant-plus-vowel combinations, such as fricatives or stops plus back vowels, require slightly more time and more effort to enunciate than do combinations composed of sibilants or nasals (or even stops) plus front vowels. Contrast the smooth flow of Tennyson's

> Sunset and evening star,
> And one clear call for me!
> And may there be no moaning of the bar. . .

with his "Ulysses," where the placement and the repetition of certain consonants help to slow the oral reading:

> "It little profits that an idle king,
> By this still hearth, among these barren crags,
> Matched with an aged wife, I mete and dole. . ."

Or consider these lines from one of Gerard Manley Hopkins' bleak sonnets:

> No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief,
> More pangs will, schooled at forepangs, wilder wring.
> Comforter, where, where is your comforting?
> Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?

In this sonnet, stressing the tortured turning caused primarily by his word order, I submit that Hopkins uses a number of stop-plus-vowel and fricative-plus-vowel combinations to slow further the oral reading of his lines. In a similar way, I think that Keats, using a "normal" word-order, stresses his haunting allusion in "Ode to A Nigtingale":

> Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
> Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
> She stood in tears amid the alien corn;

A second linguistic tool for teaching poetry is available and allowable now that both the descriptivists and the transformationalists admit that much of langauge meaning is expressed by structure, or by grammar. In an article, "Linguistics and the Study of Poetic Language," Edward Stankiewicz gives some of the implications of grammatical meaning for literary study when he says that deviations from a norm are "conditioned by the language or by the given poetic tradition. . . play with language is based on the poet's intuitive knowledge of the abstract patterns of language and of the rules of permissable sequence." If we can understand--and even know how to pronounce--the nonsense sentences used or overused by some linguists, we can follow with apparent ease the word play of Emily Dickinson,

> . . . And he unrolled his feathers
> And rowed him softer home
>
> Then oars divide the ocean,
> Too silver for a seam,
> Or butterflies, off banks of noon,
> Leap, plashless, as they swim.

We can follow the poetic suggestions of Dylan Thomas' lines:

> And honoured among wagons I was prince of the apple towns
> And once below a time I lordly had the trees and leaves
> Trail with daisies and barley
> Down the rivers of the windfall light.

And, with or without a set of transformational rules for it, we can find meaning in e. e. cummings' [anyone lived in a pretty how town]:

> when by now and tree by leaf
> she laughed his joy she cried his grief
> bird by snow and stir by still
> anyone's any was all to her
>
> someones married their everyones
> laughed their cryings and did their dance
> (sleep wake hope and then) they
> said their nevers they slept their dream

And we can follow much of Cummings' unusual imagery in "My Father Moved Through Dooms of Love:

> My father moved through dooms of love
> through sames of am through haves of give,
> singing each morning out of each night
> my father moved through depths of height
>
> this motionless forgetful where
> turned at his glance to shining here;
> that if (so timid air is firm)
> under his eyes would stir and squirm

Let me try, using the same poetry examples and some prose ones, to illustrate a few of the fringe benefits of linguistic study, the linguistic by-products that I mentioned: the recognition and near-acceptance of many varieties of both written and spoken language and the admission of the inevitability of language change <u>and</u> of changing attitudes toward language. For I believe there is more than a mere change in poetic style between the poetry of Samuel Johnson, of Tennyson, of Masefield, and the poetry of Dylan Thomas or Cummings or of Kenneth Fearing in his "Dirge":

> And wow he died as wow he lived,
> going whop to the office and blooie home to sleep and
> biff got married and bam had children and oof got
> fired,
> zowie did he live and zowie did he die.

I also think that there is more than just changes in the style and the purpose of the writing of a novel in the deliberate, if distorted, echo we hear between the following opening passages of novels a century apart:

> Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show. To begin my life with the beginning of my life, I record that I was born (as I have been informed and believe) on a Friday, at twelve o'clock at night. It was remarked that the clock began to strike, and I began to cry, simultaneously.

and

> If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don't feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth. In the first place, that stuff bores me, and in the second place, my parents would have about two hemorrhages apiece if I told anything pretty personal about them.

I regret that lack of time and, even more, lack of talent keep me from attempting a transformational analysis of one of Faulkner's sentences for you. I had planned to use his description of Jackson, in The Sound and the Fury:

> (An old duellist, a brawling lean fierce mangy durable imperishable old lion who set the wellbeing of the nation above the White House and the health of his new political party above either and above them all set not his wife's honor but the principle that honor must be defended whether it was or not because defended it was whether or not.)

Linguistics, and I include in the term both the discipline itself and the closely related areas of study, should help us to teach more about

literature and the meanings of literature than we have taught previously. If it is used, I hope it will add to literature and not delete or rearrange or transform literature into new grammatical exercises, not be used like that philosophy abhorred by Keats, to place literary works in "the dull catalogue of common things" and "conquer all mysteries by rule and line."

Notes

[1]Fowler, Roger. "Review of Language and Language Learning," Linguistics, (July, 1966), pp. 114-125.

[2]Chatman, Seymour, "The Theory of Literary Style," Linguistics, 27, (Nov., 1966), pp. 13-25.

[3]Vendler, Helen H., "Review of Essays on Style and Language," Essays in Criticism, 16, 1966, 457-467.

[4]Voeglin, C. F., "Casual and Noncasual Utterances," Style in Language, ed., Thomas A. Sebeok. Boston: The Technological Press of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1960, p. 60.

[5]Stankiewicz, Edward, "Linguistics and the Study of Poetic Language," Style in Language, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok, Boston: The Technological Press of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1960, p. 70.